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FIONA STAPLES



CHAPTER
FOUR

Saga™

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Saga

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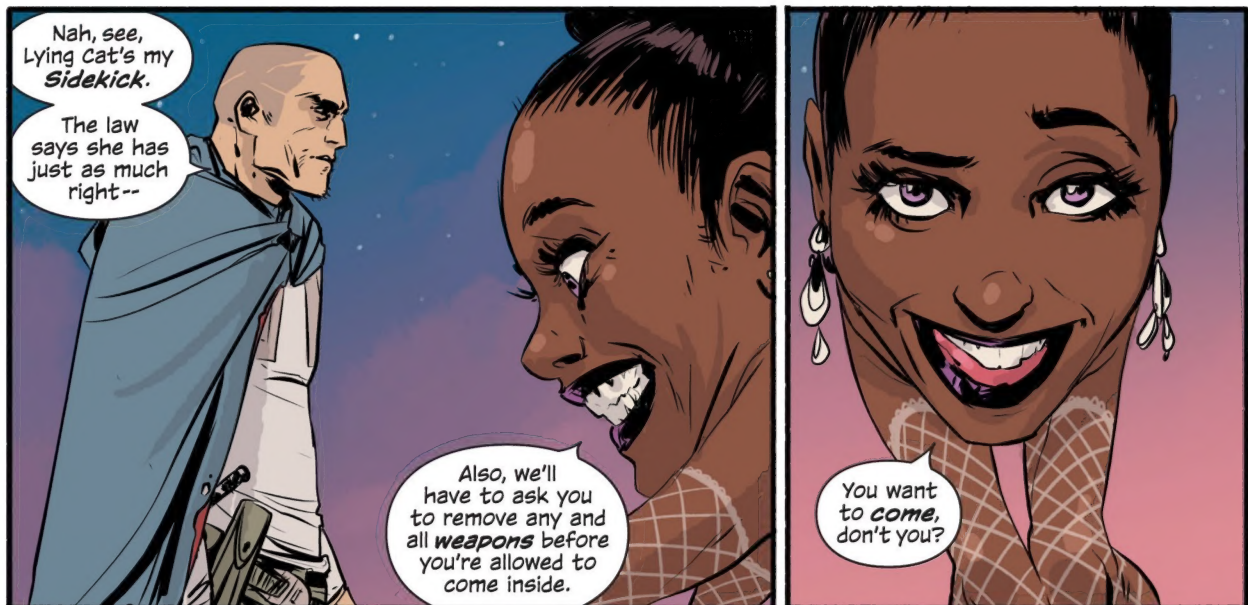
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WELCOME TO
SEXTILLION!







That's what Mom was beginning to realize on the other side of the galaxy, where my father was still fighting for his life.

Why isn't anything happening?



With the help of our new sitter, my parents and I had traveled halfway across the planet Cleave in search of a miracle.

Hm.

This magic crap takes time, Alana.

But as long as the snow keeps up, I think your husband's gonna pull through.

Not if I cut his heart out first.

The trip had not been without complications.



You're still pissed he was rambling about some other girl?

It wasn't some other girl, it was his *bride*.

He never told me he used to be married.



So what?

He's good to you and Hazel now, isn't he? Who cares if he's got history with some other broad?

If Marko could hide this from me, what else is he hiding?



Trust me, this whole freakout is probably just hormonal. You only gave birth, what, a *week* ago? Your body's still, like, a wasteland of chemical imbalance.

Forgive me if I don't take relationship advice from a dead teenager missing her vagina.



Fine, you're the boss.

And you were supposed to switch boobs ten minutes ago.

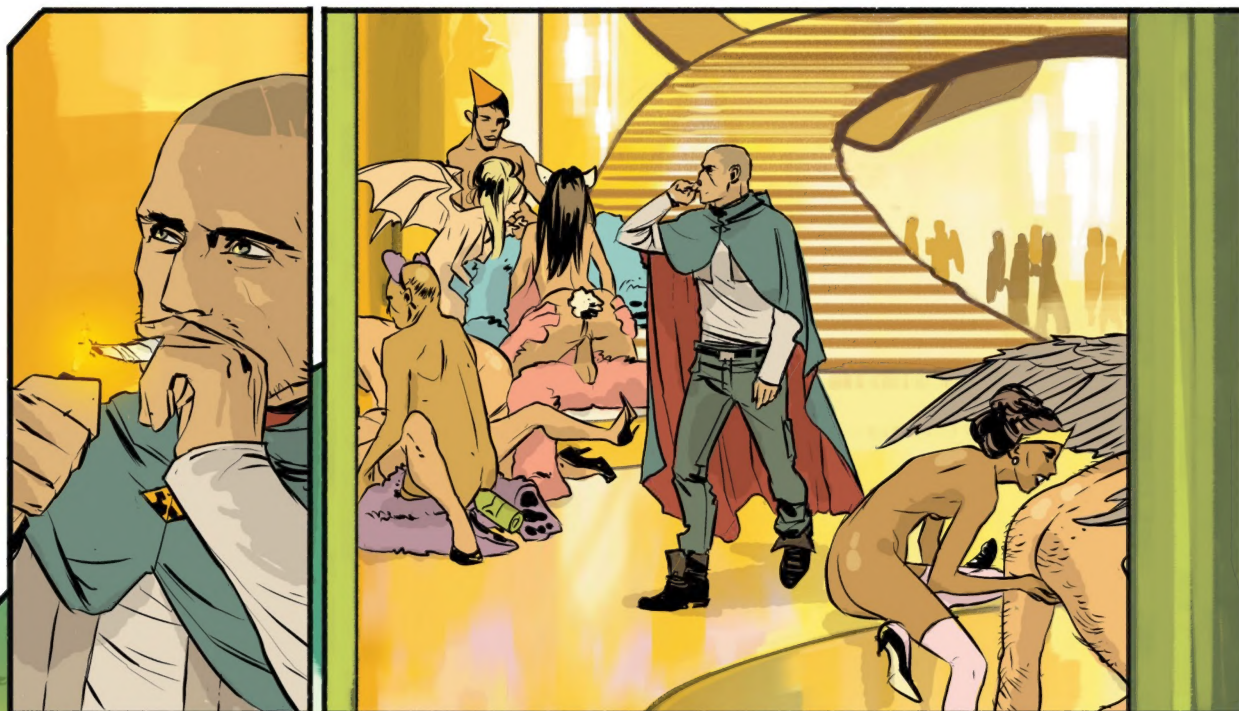
AHHH!



WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?!



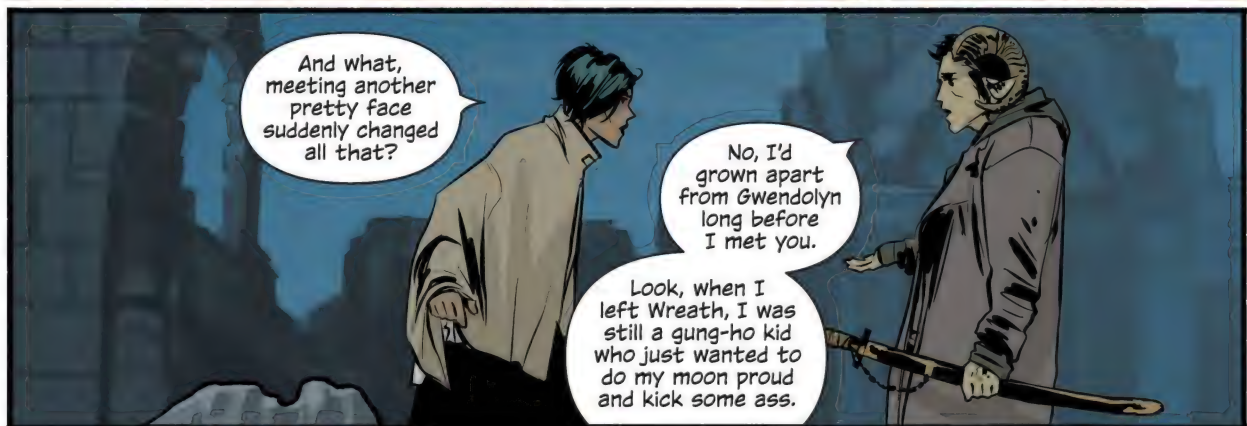










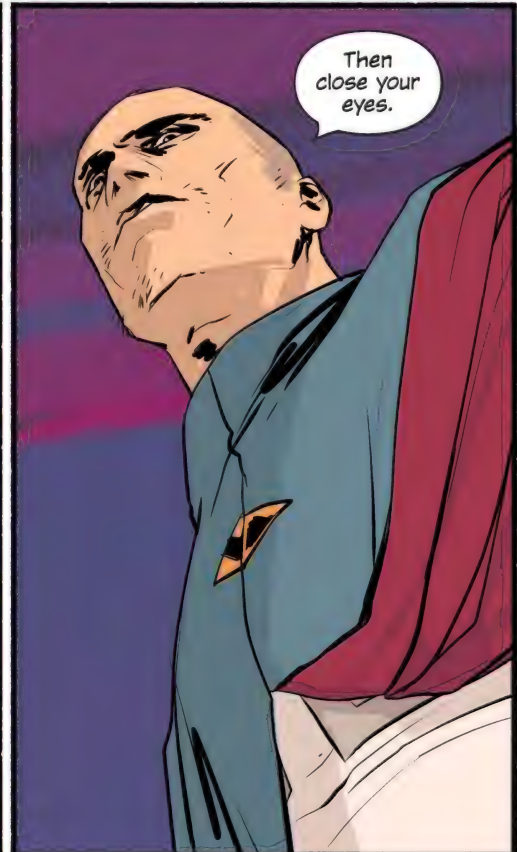
















The Will wasn't the first bounty hunter to come after my parents, and he wasn't the last.



Like every Freelancer I had the misfortune to eventually meet, he was a fucking **MONSTER**.



Thank you.

But as my family was about to learn, some monsters are worse than others...







TO BE CONTINUED

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The results are in!

Remember the jokey 'Reader Survey' we used to fill space in the back of Chapter Two? I sure didn't, until hundreds of you started mailing in your detailed responses, with many readers dutifully following orders by ripping the survey page directly out of their comics. (So be advised, deranged collectors, there are now significantly fewer of your precious 'mint copies' in the wild.)

Seriously, it was very cool of so many of you to tell the Saga team about yourselves, so I thought I'd share some of what we learned about each other. This was an extremely scientific poll with no margin of error, so all findings are 100% accurate:

2012 SAGA READER SURVEY *RESULTS*

1) If you don't mind me asking, how old are you?

Our mature readers range in age from a precocious 16 to a fucking awesome 81, with the average responder coming in around 27 years of age.

We didn't ask about your gender, but a surprising 35% of you volunteered that you were female. A good start.

2) And where are you from?

We got letters from as close as next door in Tarzana to as far away as Tanzania! To date, Brazil and New Zealand have the best stamps by a long chalk.

Readers wrote in from forty-nine states (Was it something we said, Utah?), and multiple countries, but I don't think we've heard from anyone in the armed forces yet. Just curious if there are any active military readers out there? If so, we'd love to hear from you.

3) What are your reading these days?

Not surprisingly, you guys are constant readers with eclectic tastes. Your author lists were long and diverse, but Haruki Murakami was a recurring favorite, so I should probably read one of his novels sometime, huh?

In terms of current comic crushes, the most frequently mentioned ongoing titles were *Locke & Key*, *The Walking Dead*, *Rachel Rising*, *Ultimate Spider-Man*, *The Boys*, *Buffy*, *Scalped*, *Optic Nerve*, *Wonder Woman*, *Thief Of Thieves*, and the joyous *Uncanny X-Force*, which I just spent the weekend mainlining based on your many raves.

These days, whenever I'm not rereading Jon Klassen's epic *I Want My Hat Back* for the trillionth time, I mostly read nonfiction, and I just finished two home runs that both happen

to be graphic novels set in my native Northeast Ohio:

Harvey Pekar's Cleveland – Come for the sweet Alan Moore introduction, stay for the perfect Joseph Remnant art, and be quietly but permanently changed by the way Harvey observed life in his hometown. I know I'm biased, but Pekar's final book is his best.

My Friend Dahmer – Did you know that, as a teenager, infamous serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer sweet-talked his way into the office of then-sitting Vice President Walter Mondale? Cartoonist Derf Backderf's account of going to high school with Dahmer has creeped me the fuck out for weeks now. I know that's not much of a recommendation, but there you go.

Oh, hey, as long as we're talking comics – like two years ago, before the French onion soup incident permanently severed my internet connection, I was reading a thread on Bendis' message board about favorite webcomics (I think?). Someone linked to a slice-of-life story that featured a young boy groggily waking up from a dream, then fixing cereal and watching television by himself until his hungover(?) father stumbles downstairs to speak with him. I only read the opening scene, and I know it doesn't sound like much from my shitty description, but the artwork and storytelling were PHENOMENAL. Years later, I still remember the way individual panels look.

Anyway, I planned to finish the story later, but I guess I forgot to bookmark the site, and when I went back through my history, the webcomic and any threads mentioning it had all disappeared, like a digital Brigadoon. So did I hallucinate this story, or does it really exist?

In the words of Robert Stack, if you or someone you know has any information, please contact the *To Be Continued* authorities at the above address.

Yeah, that definitely seems like the most efficient way to solve this mystery.

4) Do you buy your funny books from your friendly neighborhood retailer, or from an online site?

Not shockingly, most of you old-school letter hacks still love your brick and mortar stores, magical places with names like Laughing Ogre, Brave New Worlds, and Bedrock City. Retailers, please know that your customers ADORE you, even if they're too shy to tell you every Wednesday.

Saga also seems to have found a whole new audience through online sites like Comixology (where Fiona's colors look fucking breathtaking in HD), though one disgruntled pirate named Adam wrote in to complain that "*naming a comic something ubiquitous like Saga really makes it hard to find in the dark nether-regions of the internet.*"

Sorry about that, Adam.

5) Important: Who would win in a fight, the Hulk or Rorschach?

The majority of readers said that Hulk would make Rorschach look like his namesake, but I'm not so sure.

As a wise man once said, *"Glycon protect us from the plague-cloud."*

6) If a member of the Saga creative team were on the run from the authorities, might he or she be able to crash on your couch for a bit?

Just about all of you said yes to this, no questions asked, giving Team Saga a vast, untraceable network of criminal accomplices and international safehouses.

Your move, Interpol.

7) What is the worst recreational drug?

The two most common answers were meth and reality television, but I was struck by a response from J.B. from Bethlehem, PA, who revealed, *"Psilocybin mushrooms always give me the shits, and few things are as bad as psychedelic diarrhea."*

If we didn't already have a name for this letter column...

8) Why won't more people accept the fact that Haywire is Steven Soderbergh's very best film?

Okay, so exactly zero of you agree that *Haywire* is either better than *Schizopolis* or apparently worth checking out at all. A certain loyal gossip hound tells me that even esteemed co-creator Fiona Staples tweeted that this modern action masterpiece was merely "so-so."

In related news, I'm now accepting applications for a new artistic collaborator! All potential candidates should have prior professional credits, a strong working knowledge of and correct opinions about the Soderbergh oeuvre, and the ability to draw exactly like Fiona Staples.

9) What is your second greatest regret in life? Giving up on those piano lessons?

Roughly half of you have absolutely no regrets in life, but those of you who do almost unanimously have regrets involving high school and someone you were attracted to. So I thought about encouraging any of our high school readers out there to just do exactly what they're most afraid of before it's too late... but then I read that Dahmer book. Maybe some of you awkward teenagers would be better off just continuing to live your lives of quiet desperation, you know?

The most heartbreaking regret was from David P. of San Francisco, who's spent "several years" cursing himself for not buying an elusive fire-breathing Godzilla cigarette lighter the one and only time he saw it. Haunting!

10) Seriously, what is wrong with my eye?

While many of you guessed I had whatever mysterious left eye condition plagues both Longshot and Cable, only Jon C. from Cleburne, Texas correctly diagnosed my burst blood vessel.

It's all better now, thanks, though my wife doesn't like me nearly as much without the eyepatch, which is like the opening to a really bad supervillain origin or a pretty good Raymond Carver story.

11) What is the only truly excellent Mexican restaurant in New York City?

I know there are many wonderful Mexican restaurants in NYC, I just haven't been to one yet, and apparently, neither have any of you.

Dylan B. from Green Bay, Wisconsin swears by *"Maui Tacos on 5th Avenue, right by the Empire State Building,"* but you'll forgive me if literally every word of that recommendation gives me pause.

12) Ian Fleming once wrote that James Bond liked sex best when it had "the sweet tang of rape." Does this change the way you feel about the character and/or life on this planet?

Most dudes were appalled by this, but nearly every single female responder said that she understood the sentiment completely. None of them were condoning actual rape, of course, but most were sympathetic to the unique leanings of a man who never gets anything but exactly what he wants, especially if that man looks like a young Sean Connery. As Julie T. from Texas put it, *"I have no confidence in my ability to convince James that it would be anything but mind-blowingly consensual."*

I dunno. Special Agent Baldpatch loves only the sweet tang of Tang.

13) If you had to permanently give up either chocolate or cheese (in each of their infinite varieties), which would you choose?

People thought about this question more than I thought about where to go to college. The results were laser-cut 50/50 between chocolate and cheese, with only the strictest of vegans not discussing suicide options immediately after making their choice.

14) When was the last time you watched a play, and what was it?

I should have guessed that so many of you would turn out to be drama nerds, with one dedicated reader (Eamon M. from Philly) even filling out our survey in the wings of his community theater production of *Into The Woods* after the death of the character he's playing (spoiler, The Wolf).

Break a leg, Eamon and friends.

15) What do you think Image publisher Eric Stephenson's darkest secret is?

"That he didn't catch the obvious typo in survey question three."
Brian L. from Austin, Texas

Good eye, Brian... unless that "typo" is merely the latest clue in genius designer Fonografiks' increasingly bedeviling Hidden Scavenger Hunt Contest?

Only Eric Stephenson knows for sure.

16) Which of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is most assuredly an atheist?

Most votes went to Donatello, then Raphael, but it's Paul T. from Dorset, England who singlehandedly disproves God's existence by revealing, *"I know not of these ninja turtles of which you speak, since over on this side of the Atlantic they were called 'Hero Turtles'. To stop kids from becoming ninjas."*

A childhood without ninjas? Shit is getting pretty *Oliver Twist* over there, huh?

17) Have we dated?

"No, but Ex Machina certainly has. Zing!"

Kees from Melbourne, Australia

Yes, very droll, Kees. But don't think the fact you live on the other side of the planet will stop artist/cantankerous old man Tony Harris from coming to find you. And when he does, he's going to clog your toilets.

He's going to clog them forever.

18) Would you rather be trapped on the island from *Lost* with your mom or dad, and why?

Fathers won out with nearly sixty-five percent of the vote, which makes me wonder if any of you have ever seen the television program *Lost* before.

19) When was the last time you were naked in front of someone in a nonsexual context?

"I posed bottomless for a prison art-rehabilitation class."

John from Windsor, CA

"Strip Boggle, it was actually awesome."

Kaila from Haymarket, VA

"Routine medical exam or never, I guess."

Just About Everyone Else, Said While Looking Down At Shoes

20) Are you Banksy, and if so, can we do anything to help?

Most of you ding-dongs responded with some version of either *"Who is Banksy?"* or *"Yes, I am Banksy, and you can help by sending me cash."*

But Josh A. from Oklahoma wrote, *"I am not Banksy, but if I was, I doubt I'd want your help. No offense."*

None taken, Mr. Banksy.

21) Who had a greater impact on your upbringing, your favorite librarian or your favorite coach?

This softball question was just an excuse for me to print lots of nice things about librarians, who are without exception the best people on the planet. And while a lot of readers wrote in to say just that, they were far outweighed by the number of you who said your lives were forever altered by one very specific kind of coach: your karate instructor.

Seriously, SO MANY of you wrote in with moving tales of growing up with your own personal Mr. Miyagi. Is this phenomenon way more common than I realized, or does *Saga* just happen to have a readership comprised primarily of lethal martial arts experts?

22) What are you working on these days, anything creative?

Every single person who completed our survey admitted to working on something creative. Fantastic.

23) Wait, why did you abandon it?

But then people got either really insulted or really defensive about this question. Do not use your karate on me!

24) Relax, I'm sure it's great. Listen, why not put down this comic and do a little work on your thing RIGHT NOW?

Again, many of these responses were polite excuses or angry rebuttals, but a handful of you just thanked us for what Thomas R. from Chula Vista, California called *"a much-needed kick to the ass."*

We love all of our readers equally, but we love readers like Thomas most equally.

25) Cool, but before you do, if you were to be reincarnated as an inanimate object, what would it be?

Any of you wags who responded with some variation of *"Christina Hendricks's vibrator"* deserve to end up as one — a dusty, unused sex toy in the bottom of an unopened celebrity gift bag.

But Hamburger K. Vaughan's favorite response was this one from Juliana M. from Bessemer, Alabama: *"An intricately designed, handmade pocket watch hanging from a proud man's clothes or nestled warmly in an antique store."*

By delighting my dachshund, Juliana becomes the fortunate recipient of this month's detritus from the Almighty Prize Drawer: some used Silly Putty, a pen from the Universal Life Church (for a significant fee, I'm available to officiate ship christenings), a clothespin I stole from the house of a moderately famous person, a signed *Saga* something, and a copy of *Les Seigneurs De Bagdad*, a lovely new French translation of my and Niko Henrichon's *Vertigo* graphic novel *Pride Of Baghdad*, brought to you by the fine folks at Urban Comics (who will also be handling the upcoming French editions of *Saga*, le plug plug).

Once again, on behalf of the whole team, thanks to everyone who took the time to lick an envelope and thereby send us a sample of your DNA. There's no way we'll ever use it for evil, especially after my eyepatch returns.

Next month, Marko actually does something, and we get back to printing more of your penetrating thoughts about our story, unless we just feel like showing blurry photos of some of the bizarre physical objects people have sent in to the *To Be Continued* offices and okay yeah that's what we're doing.

I miss you so much,
Brian